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ABSTRACT

Sixty-eight kindergarten teachers (from a town in Austria) who had previously labeled selected students in their classes as either aggressive or socially competent completed a questionnaire and were observed in their classroom interactions. The questionnaire yielded biographical and sociographical data of the teachers, assessed teacher attitudes, and collected responses to nine descriptions of hypothetical problem situations with aggressive children. Teacher-child interactions were observed in a scenario in which teachers were asked to produce picture in concert with the children, using a large piece of paper mounted on the wall. Teacher behavior toward those children previously labeled aggressive was significantly less adequate (compared to behaviors toward those labeled socially competent) in terms of the following responses: reinforcement, punishment, ignoring, explaining, questions, and comments. (JW)

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TITLE OF THE PAPER:

LABELING PROCESS AND ITS EFFECT
ON TEACHERS' INTERACTIONS WITH
EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED CHILDREN

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A. PROBLEM AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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This presentation deals with an empirical study about child rearing practices of inservice kindergarten teachers in interaction with aggressive and socially competent 4 to 6 years old preschool children.

As epidemiological studies have yielded, the percentage of psychopathological disorders in the early and later childhood lies between 10 and 26%, reported by European surveys (Thalmann 1971, Richman & Graham 1971, Shepherd/Oppenheim/Mitchell 1973) as well as by American surveys (Werry & Quay 1971). This amount of behaviorally disturbed children sets high demands on the professional capacities of teachers, whereas aggressive and antisocial disorders are perceived especially bothering for teachers, leading them to more negative predictions for the school careers of children affected with those disturbances (Feshbach 1969, Kedar-Voivodas/Tannenbaum 1979). As shown by Olweus (1976), the stability coefficient of aggressiveness is a relatively high one, comparable with the stability coefficient of intelligence (after 10 years it still has an average of $r = .60$).

These are only some arguments to justify further investigation of teachers' capacities for coping with problem children. Guided by the objective that aggressive children should get the chance to acquire social competence as early as possible for preventing more severe problems in later years, I started to investigate the adequacy of teacher behavior towards children whom they labeled as "aggressive" and "socially competent".

Mainly two groups of studies influenced my own investigations:

1. The work of G.R. PATTERSON and his co-authors (1976, 1977, 1979) as well as the work of A. BANDURA and his co-authors (1973, 1979). Both of the authors recur explicitly on specific learning theoretical approaches (operant conditioning and modeling) and both of them try to explain by their experiments how aggressive behavior of children can be acquired, maintained and altered.
2. The studies of J.E. BROPHY/GOOD T.L. and their co-authors (1970, 1973, 1974), which were designed to specify and confirm the "Pygmalion effect" (Rosenthal/Jacobson 1968). In the work of Brophy & Good (1974), Silberman (1969, 1971) and some German authors (Hofer 1979, 1982) labeling processes are investigated

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mainly in the field of cognitive functions, but only a few empirical assessments refer to the domain of social-emotional behavior in Preschool children (Feshbach 1969, Kedar-Voivodas/Tannenbaum 1979).

Derived from this theoretical and empirical background, the main hypothesis of my study says, that children labeled as "aggressive" by their teachers receive less adequate responses for their destructive as well as for their constructive social behavior than children who are labeled as "socially competent" (polarization hypothesis).

The requirement of compensating undesired child behavior needs a standard for measuring the adequacy of teacher responses, for which I tried to construe a "reference model" following the results mentioned above (table 1).

Table 1: Reference model of teacher behavior following different social behavior categories of children

teacher behavior	social behavior of children	
	destructive	constructive
reinforcement	-	+ 1)
punishment	-	-
modeling/shap.	+	Ø
ignoring	+	-
commanding	-	-
listening	Ø	+
explaining & others	Ø	Ø

1) + = frequent application

- = rare/no application

Ø = average application/no hypothesis specified

B. Methods and techniques

The empirical assessment of teacher-child-interactions comprised a questionnaire study and an observation study, conducted with 68 teachers interacting with socially competent children and 61 teachers interacting with aggressive children.*). The sample was drawn randomly from the population of 130 kindergartenteachers of a medium sized town in Austria.

*) The 61 teachers were a subsample of the 68 teachers.

The questionnaire consisting of several parts yielded three groups of data:

1. Biographic and sociographic data of the teachers
2. teacher attitudes (attitude scales),
3. Answers to 9 descriptions of hypothetical problem situations with aggressive children (content analysis).

The observation study (sequential analysis) was conducted in the natural setting of the kindergartens (1 teacher in interaction with a group of 4 children, 1-2 aggressive ones, 2 socially competent ones).

In order to create tense conditions for teacher-child-interactions, the teachers were asked to produce a common picture with the kids, using a big piece of wall paper. These situations were recorded by Video and analyzed by well trained students, cooperating in this project. The Correspondence between 2 observers reached an average of 79 %, according to Bijou et al. (1969, "Signed Place to Place-Correspondence"). Since the teacher-child interactions were recorded at two times (a space of 4 to 6 weeks lay between the two sessions) it was also possible to check the test-retest-reliability of the teachers' behavior. The coefficients varied between .31 and .86 for the different categories (also related to the frequency of the emitted teacher categories, see table 3).

The sequential recordings registered in each case the teacher behavior following a constructive or a destructive child behavior, so that we could only register the consequences but not the antecedences of child behavior (examples for the teacher and child categories see table 2).

For the assessment of the two groups of children, labeled as "aggressive" and "socially competent", the teachers had to complete rating scales, consisting of a list of features, typical for anti-social resp. prosocial behavior. With these ratings the most striking children in a teachers class could be characterized.

The mentioned design made it possible to test the comparison of three assessment instruments (two questionnaire instruments and the observational instrument), this however is not the contents of this report. The following ^{results} are only focussing on the observation study.

C. Results and conclusions;

The results illustrated in table 3 are not overwhelming in so far as the categories show a relatively small number of frequencies. But the statistical analysis with a 2-factor MANOVA (calculated with BMDP 4 V, 1981) revealed a significant overall interaction between the variables "label" (aggressive, socially competent), "social behavior of the children" (destructive, constructive) and "child rearing behavior of the teachers" (see table 4).

Table 2: Examples for illustrating the behavior categories of children and teachers

Social behavior
of children

- destructive: verbal and physical aggression (yelling, hitting, fighting, assaultive, incooperative) disruptive and destructive behavior hidden aggression
- constructive: helping, sharing, comforting, reinforcing, estimating, making suggestions, offering compromises, positive affection, etc.

Child rearing behavior
of teachers

- reinforcement: positive reinforcement like praising, estimating, spending attention, smiling, positive affection, negative reinforcement like relieving somebody from something uncomfortable
- punishment: aversive consequences on a child's behavior like shouting, blaming, exposing, etc. withdrawal of positive reinforcers like taking away something from the child (toy, candies, etc.)
- ignoring: the teacher doesn't respond to a certain social behavior (intentionally or not intentionally, what can't be differentiated by observation merely)
- modeling/shap.: actions and utterances of the teacher aimed at supporting children in training their prosocial behavior (giving prompts and hints for positive interactions, showing or describing models, actual help, etc.)
- commanding: in comparison to a suggestion the child is more or less verbally forced to do what the teacher wants him/her to do
- listening: in contrast to ignoring the teacher gives attention to what the child has done or said without sanctioning the child's actions, looks "how the things come up"
- explaining
questions
comments
suggestions } these categories were defined as well for observational reasons but there were not specified hypotheses made under learning theoretical aspects

Table 3: Means (M) and standard deviations (s) of the teacher behavior as an effect of the variables "label" and "social behavior of children" (within in a time unit of 1000 seconds = 16'40'')

teacher behavior	label	(N = 61) aggressive				(N = 68) social comp.			
		destr.		constr.		destr.		constr.	
	social behavior	M	s	M	s	M	s	M	s
reinforcement		—	—	3,81	3,13	—	—	2,77	2,74
punishment		0,17	0,48	1,04	1,20	0,03	0,02	0,42	0,62
modeling/shap.		0,02	0,09	0,08	0,26	0,01	0,003	0,08	0,26
ignoring		0,45	0,88	2,98	2,50	0,26	0,49	1,73	1,95
commanding		0,13	0,46	0,40	0,51	0,02	0,01	0,21	0,36
listening		0,94	2,06	4,44	4,61	0,27	0,60	2,92	3,49
explaining & others }		0,16	0,19	5,57	1,40	0,05	0,16	2,65	0,90
sum		1,87		18,32		0,644		10,78	

Table 4: 2-factor MANOVA for testing the interactional effects of the variables "label" and "social behavior" on teacher behavior

teacher behavior	Univariate F-test for the factor "label" x "social b." (df = 1 & 127)	Significance (p < 0,01)	Expl.Variance (%) PV = 100 ω^2 +)
reinforcement	4,0	s.	5
punishment	8,0	s.s.	11
modeling/shap	0,01	-	0,01
ignoring	6,7	s.s.	9
commanding	0,6	-	0,4
listening	1,5	-	1
explaining	5,0	s.	6
questions	15,9	s.s.	22
comments	14,4	s.s.	20
suggestions	0,8	-	1
Multivariate significance test for the interaction factor "label" x "social behavior" on the teacher behavior: Hotelling's $T^2 = 30,4$ $F = 2,83$ $df = 10 \text{ \& } 118$ $p < 0,01$			

$$+)\omega^2 = \frac{F df_z}{\sum F df_z + df_N} \quad (\text{Hays, 1973})$$

A table with the percentages of the distributed teacher behavior towards the two groups of children, shows more clearly the differential effects of teacher behavior (see table 5). Children who are perceived and labeled as "aggressive" are treated significantly less adequate in comparison to children who are labeled as "socially competent", in terms of the "reference model" illustrated above.

Table 5: Observed teacher behavior as an effect of the variables "label" and "social behavior of children" (%)

teacher behavior	label	(N = 61) aggressive		(N = 68) social comp.	
	social behavior ch.	destr. %	constr. %	destr. %	constr. %
reinforcement		-	21	-	26
punishment		9	6	4	4
modeling/shap.		1	-	1	1
ignoring		24	16	40	16
commanding		7	2	3	1
listening		50	24	43	27
explaining, questions, comments, etc. }		9	31	9	25
sum		100%	100%	100%	100%

These results correspond from their tendency with findings of Brophy & Good (1970), Silberman (1969, 1971), Hofer et al. (1979) and confirm the polarization hypothesis: the perception and valuation of a child as "aggressive" leads to a teacher behavior which makes it difficult for those children to alter their problem behavior. This however must be the focus of a better preservice and especially inservice training of kindergarten teachers. They have to be trained in preventing the fatal effects of a vicious circle mechanism, especially by interacting with "high risk groups" as there are children of male sex (nearly 4 times as much male than female children were nominated for the "aggressive" subjects, 82% male, 18% female - in comparison to "socially competent" subjects, 57% male, 43% female) and children of low socioeconomic status (30% of the aggressive labeled children are lowest class children in comparison to 10% of the socially competent labeled kids).

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